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A JAPANESE VIEW OF AMERICAN TRADE
UNIONISM.

Kipling, in his *Kim*, has told of "the wheel." Now the cycle of the wheel is from the fixed to the frenzied. Only in the middle poise does the part live the whole. Planets, nations, men, alternate between torpor and fury. The sun is flame; the moon is flint; the earth is now one, now the other. Only in infinitesimal islands do the heavens afford men; only in fitful moments do men attain reason. Apparently the most difficult of all cosmic feats is to balance on two legs comprehendingly. Only the perfect soul is forever poised and fully lives. To seek this *pulse* and *poise* is the only natural right of man.

Earth has nowhere yet reached this perfection; this perpetual union of comprehending and living; this sane union of religion and politics. China is, in both, asleep. In religion, if we credit Professor James's evidence, Christendom itself is still between the throes of crass and of effervescent extremes; he has combed history for "varieties of religious experience," and finds only catalepsy and hysteria, stoicism and ecstasy; the religion and enthusiasm of wholesome everyday sanity is not mentioned in his pages. The anti-imperialist finds the politics of Christendom less wholesome than its religion.

Nevertheless, there is here a sounder religion and politics than ever on earth before; a spirit that will make even of the smoke of chimneys a wholesome and worshiping incense. The earth turns on a celestial axis forward—even China—and while in darkness men see it not. Strangely it is midnight in the East and morning in the West, yet because of this morning *somewhere*, the whole world steadies to a fuller dawn; the example of America spreads refulgent across the Pacific.

The recent coal strike momentarily examples America's yet partially hysterical cosmology. For a day it fumed with the crude fury of a sun spot. Nevertheless, its electric storm-center swirled deeper into the natural rights of man than ever in history; and he who best gauges its abiding illumination within the minds of men, best gauges present civilisation; he who best fixes it there, most helps mankind.

Fundamental rights are those concerned—the soul and structure of the day:

“We have the *right* to stand for a living wage! to deny this is to crush mankind!”

“*We* have the right to hire whom we can! to deny this is to crush industry!”

“We have the right to work where we can! to deny this is to crush liberty!”

“We have the right to sell for what we can get! to deny this is to crush trade!”

“We the people have the right to the coal! to deny this is to stultify the purpose of all government!”

Yet, under present conditions, not one of these rights can be unreservedly realised and any other one of them survive. The fingers of each, in the world's circling chain-gang, has the throat of the next in death-grip; one clutches and all strangle. Thus stand the respective hordes over the abyss of inaction (industries' hell) like fighting brutes; each paralysed by the common danger and stumped for his next aggression. Not *all* thus! In no weak measure is the simile as unjust as it is repulsive; and the most substantial evidence of Western civilisation is that, behind the snapping and snarling of those actually bitten in the fray, the bone and sinew of its people are soberly studying how the intricacies of the situation may be intelligently mastered.

The core of these industrial flames may be cooled and resolved by considering the nature of “rights” in general. And to make the study telling, let us examine what at first sight appears to be the most impressive and invincible statement called forth by the coal strike episode; that in which the report of its commission may be said to culminate:

“Our language is the language of a free people, and fails to furnish any form of speech by which the right of a citizen to work when he pleases, for whom he pleases, and on what terms he pleases can be successfully denied. . . . This seems all too plain for argument. Common sense and common law alike denounce the conduct of those who interfere with this fundamental right of the citizen.”

The misfortune of these eloquent words is, as Augustine

Birrell says of the arguments that Milton put into the mouth of his Almighty, "the common intelligence of to-day refutes them"; or, as has been said of Burke's letter on deep-ploughing, "it is magnificent, but is not farming." In Patrick Henry's day, when the problem was to fight together rather than to live together, these would have been ringing phrases. But in modern industrial economy they are fusty; they are neither true in fact nor in principle; they illumine nothing and obscure everything; they are nocuous rather than stabilitate. When this is everywhere understood, the strike problem will be half solved.

No man in America can legally work when he pleases. He cannot work on Sunday. No child can work more than a restricted number of hours a day; nor without certain weeks of schooling. In the federal service no man may work longer than eight hours a day, save exceptionally. Everywhere laws dictate hours and holidays in ways that establish both the fact and the principle that no man has any "fundamental right" to work save when common welfare prescribes; none to pull in earth's harness in any way that balks the most perfect action of the team. The strike-breaker has rights that I will presently define. But the notion, that he or any man has a right to work when he pleases and with which "no law may interfere," is as crude as the other notion, ballooning the heads of some labor organizations, that they have a right to work *only* when they please. Hurlled from the teeth, both these "rights" are blind and inflammatory. If general welfare may set hours and holidays, it has the same "fundamental right" and duty to set all the occasions when men shall not work *and when they shall work*. The future is likely to furnish as many occasions when this principle must be enforced in the one way as in the other. Yet it cannot be enforced either way, unless it be established as a general principle working both ways.

Nor may any American work for *whom* he pleases. No man may sell himself into slavery, whether he will or not. No man may practice law, nor medicine, nor peddle in the street, nor work under unsanitary conditions, nor in New York be a barber, save under prescribed conditions, either for whom he

pleases nor for one who may please to have him. The laws are full of these restrictions on man from working for any of the powers of ignorance or of evil. And soon he may work as little for the powers of confusion and of strife.

Nor may any man *hire whom he can*: he cannot bring an alien to this country under contract; he cannot bring a Chinaman at all.

Not one of these things can be reconciled with the pretended right of a citizen "to work when he pleases, for whom he pleases, or on what terms he pleases." On the contrary they declare that man shall work for wisdom alone, when she pleases, and on what terms she pleases—in short, for common welfare.

Here we swing back into "torpor" and commonplace, unless we "poise" this maxim till it clear the atmosphere of blinding chaff and irritating fume.

The secret is that originally and under their enacting conditions each one of these rights expressed some common welfare. These conditions have changed. The people do not comprehend this. Therefore they contend for these "rights" after they have become evils.

Originally the tadpole enjoyed a tail and had a right to it. And the judge on his bench, who now profoundly proclaims "the native and inalienable right of a man to work when he pleases" commits a scarcely less ludicrous anachronism than would a bullfrog, on his bog, maintaining the right of his fellows still to exercise their "native and constitutional appendages." In 1776 employment was simple. To-day it is complicated. The anatomy of a man's right to work at all has been as profoundly changed as that of the tadpole—and much in the same fashion.

Before saying more about "the right to work" it will be instructive to note the metamorphosis of certain other rights. The feudal lord owned all the land; no smaller holding could maintain itself in those marauding times. With peace came private ownership in perpetual entail; having sloughed brigandage, the earth was gripped in permanent inheritance. In England, to-day, only crown lands can be so entailed. In

America, a man's will cannot control land beyond two generations. In cities, the laws are now full of building restrictions; the rights of all more and more enrich the rights of each. In certain parts of Boston a man may not build higher than ninety feet; this is æsthetic evolution. In Germany a man may not build a "spite fence"; this is moral evolution. In Ireland an owner may not set the rental on his own property; this is fundamental revolution, and regarding it the Lord High Chancellor declares that it "revolutionises the legal conception of the right of private ownership throughout Great Britain." According to this enlightened conception private ownership has no rights save such as subserve general welfare. Not that the abstract principle of private rights as subservient to general welfare has in reality been at all changed, but the conditions of general welfare have been revolutionised, and therefore the conditions of individual welfare. So long as conditions were simple private ownership was simple. Now that general welfare is very complicated private ownership is enhanced by greater and greater subservience to the new conditions of general welfare. Nor does privacy dwell less sequestered when greater bounty covers the whole land.

Next as to the rights of trade. Recently they burst to attention, through this same coal strike, with a flame that for a moment dazed the continent. It flared from the empty grate with more than solar fury. It lashed the sky, roaring, "Roast the Trusts!" The politicians lighted the auto-da-fe, with joyful expectancy of its campaigning utility. The Sherman Act furnished the pyrè. The Northern Securities decision was the heralded celebration. The devil was at last scorched; the country saved.

No shock ever more suddenly brought civilisation to realise its transformed anatomy. In pronouncing judgment the Court prophetically tempered its severity. Within a night it was widely appreciated that the principle of merger has become so ingrained into the working structure of every industry, that to persue the threatened policy consistently would disrupt the established warp and woof of the land; that by blindly reveng-

ing the transitory evils of merger America would but cripple its might and foul its splendor.

This she will not do. Already she is comprehending, already is conscious, that nature is in deeper "conspiracy" than man. She has quit croaking about her tadpole "rights of trade" and set to discovering how her myriad-footed metamorphosis may be exercised in feats of harmonious performance. Merger is no longer dreaded. This change of public front was slow in maturing, quick in crystalising, and is perceived to be accomplished by those who observe.

The Titans are astir. Their thunder is for "rights." If welfare result, depends on whether or not the sons of Uranus have yet evolved into men, men capable of self-government—of that team-work of heaven whence spring all "rights." The "poise" of calm comprehension is its secret. When not comprehended rights soon become again forces of chaos: grievances that crowd to maelstroms of strife; class-passions that corrode and cause subterranean eruptions; fake enthusiasms that rush to engulfing quicksands. But let it be understood that every right springs from some definite condition; that no right outlives its condition; that every right of industry has been transformed, in the gigantic growth of the times, beyond the power of any one man to comprehend it; that under these vastly changed conditions there can no longer be talk of the customary rights of any man, but only of what is now right for all; let the people of America now show that they comprehend this and are capable of patiently, wisely debating all phases of these new circumstances upon the simple principle of honor and good-faith, and it will indeed be proven that in this land prosperity establishes her richest ideal and time his fullest stature of men.

Not rights but what is right is the sole question. This maxim alone will not settle any problems; but it will banish false issues and concentrate attention on real ones. Let us apply it to pressing cases.

One of these concerns the right of labor organisations to dictate terms and wages. This involves the counter right of employers to hire whom they can on their own terms. Both

are impregably entrenched in law. The circumstances however are these: under unrestrained competition wages inevitably trend to a starvation minimum. In proportion as employment becomes concentrated in the hands of a few this trend becomes dangerous. The organization of labor to resist it is the only possible remedy, and is absolutely essential against the degradation of mankind. Moreover it *will* organize to this end; and to recognize the *just* demands of such organization is equally indispensable to all future peace and prosperity. Recent occurrences have brought this home to the public so conclusively that hereafter it can scarcely be a matter of debate. Recognition of the unions is right, if their demands are right; right is paramount to the legal rights of any one; and the sole question now is: Are the demands and aims of the unions right?

I have said that if this maxim be accepted the real issues will appear. Let us examine some of these.

Labor organizations are among the giant forces of the times. They have come to stay. They will become more and more dominant. They are subject to human frailties as well as to reason. Already they betray tendencies only one remove less dangerous than those the unions would surmount; and these tendencies should be brought to the forefront of public recognition and debate for correction, rather than let them develop and fester while public attention is vehemently directed to false issues.

Most of these dangerous tendencies spring from real difficulties that are not easily surmounted without the hearty co-operation of employers; and they have some excuse so long as the entire efforts of the unions must be spent in fighting for their bare existence. But let this fighting cease, and let the employers and the public come forward with hearty good faith not only to remedy these evils but honorably to adjust those difficulties to which they are incident, and both objects will speedily find their accomplishment.

Let me instance some of these evils and the conditions under which they originate and thrive. At this moment a union is being formed among the janitors of Chicago. Under its rules

no one of them is to be permitted to case a door, mend a window cord, set a pane of glass, file a key, lay a stroke of paint, fix a stop-cock, clean a trap, or do any other small job that infringes on any one of "the trades." If a landlord calls a regular workman to do any of these jobs, rules are already prescribed by each particular union. A plumber must bring his assistant if it be only to solder a leak in a pipe. A mason must have a hodcarrier if it is only to carry two bricks to the roof. Trade rules are full of these tyrannies against economy and common sense. Yet they have had a certain and perhaps justifiable excuse. So long as these unions were forced to fight for their existence and recognition they were compelled to resort to every possible legal weapon of warfare. Continue to deny the unions what is right and this method of warfare with its wrongs will continue.

Let the employers and public opinion once lift the problem to the level of honor and justice and the unions themselves will be forced to the same high plane. No such silly tyrannies ever did or ever can continue in face of a public opinion that is resolved to have justice done equally and alike for all.

Again certain trade rules restrict the amount that a clever workman shall do in a day, and stipulate equal pay for good and bad workmen alike. This makes for depravity among the workmen, for deterioration of their spirit and skill, for disorganisation of good business management, against the supremacy of American industries, and against the welfare of all successful men of fortune. Yet it has its explanation with the other tyrannical rules—and the same remedy. These organisations are composed of men like other men. Continue to fight them, either blindly or unscrupulously, and these evils will continue. Recognise the unions, encourage their manhood, raise their issues to the plane of intelligent and fair debate, and the unions will respond on the same plane. There never was a body of intelligent men able to withstand continuously the invitation of public opinion to deal with them on the highest terms of manhood and honor—least of all, any body of Americans such as these unions comprise.

Another issue obscured under the blind frenzy about

"rights" is that regarding wages. Next to the establishment of their organization, the increase of wages has occupied the chief efforts of the unions. Yet, upon careful consideration, it is evident that this is a misdirected effort that works for the laboring man more harm than good. If wages rise the cost of living rises accordingly. It does not lie in the power of labor unions to prevent this. Some particular trade gets a temporary advantage which all the other trades pay for. And in the end the capitalist reaps the sole advantage; and reaps it for three reasons: first, because he always adds the same old percentage of profits to the new scale of wages; second, because every general increase of wages is slow and difficult of accomplishment, while the price of goods is easily and instantly increased; therefore, in every seesaw between wages and price the laboring purchaser always gets the worst of it; and, third, the constant change of wages and price creates a risk and uncertainty to business which capital always makes the laboring purchaser pay for. It is true that, in America, wages are higher in proportion to 'cost of living than in any other land, and higher now than fifty years ago. But the unions make a vast mistake if they credit this to their efforts to *raise* wages. Rather it is due to America's increased standard of living. In so far as the efforts of the unions have prevented wages from *falling* they have conduced to this increase in the standard of living. Yet this should not obscure the fact that this standard is chiefly due to the general advance of civilisation and industrial prosperity in a new and free country; that this prosperity will be greatest when its business conditions are both most just and most stabler; that increase of *daily* wages does not and cannot secure the end the unions have in view, but works with full force directly against it—unsettles business and chiefly harms the workman whose wages change less quickly than the price of goods.

One of the most serious faults of unionism at present is, that each trade thinks only of having *its* wages raised. This cannot be remedied until a federation of unions be formed having a common purpose for all. The sound purpose of all the unions should be to reduce the share that goes to private capital. This

can be accomplished only in one of two ways: in reducing its percentage of the profits, or in transforming private capital into public ownership. Every share of watered stock on which the laboring man must earn an unjust dividend is just so much money cheated from his wages. It may safely be said that, for the present, the chief efforts of the unions should be directed to the correction of this most gigantic of American evils; and in this task the unions will have the whole force of public opinion with them. But even here they must act carefully and wisely. For so long as the conduct of industry is in the hands of private capital, it must be granted a fair and stimulating profit.

No great permanent good can come to the unions in the future unless they have a common object. Public ownership, wisely and honestly administered, undoubtedly is the sole condition under which the profits of labor can be wholly secured to labor. But here there are two obstacles: the intelligence of the laboring man, and the lack of common, everyday honesty everywhere. Not that the amount of intelligence required of the average man for public ownership is very great. All that is required of him is enough to see that public ownership and his welfare are impossible so long as the enthusiasm of the mass of laboring men for honest administration is not sufficiently strong to enforce it. The power to secure their welfare is in their hands alone. Let the unions rise in their might for honesty everywhere, and against dishonesty anywhere—in the unions and out of them—let them make this the one main issue and the intelligence of the world will be at their service in securing and administering public ownership, and they will accomplish more than by a thousand years of manouverings for a deceptive rise of wages.

Next, in order of effort, the unions have endeavored to secure shorter hours of labor. Yet how much wiser it would be to contend for shorter *years* of labor. Forty-eight hours a week, certainly are few enough for any able-bodied and thrifty man to work. Rather than to shorten these the unions should aim to have their old men retired on a pension, and their children given more years of education and training, and the best

that earth can afford. This, continued from generation to generation, can alone raise the laboring man to such intelligence and equality as mankind is capable of, and give him that qualification for self-government, for economic independence, and for looking after his own welfare, upon which his prosperity must ever depend. Not shorter hours but shorter years of service for the great body of workingmen who constitute the main army of life; a perfected youth, a vigorous manhood, an enjoyed old age, this indicates the proper method of curtailing the over-production of machinery and of securing its advantages through equality of opportunity for the uplifting of all.

An actual incident may now bring this lesson in natural rights to forceful application. At the height of the strike frenzy, and at the moment when blood and devastation were very imminent, quite a number of well-intending people proclaimed the scab a hero. Plainly these people thought, in a narrow way, of the legal right involved, and gave but little consideration to what was morally right under the actual situation. The unions demanded recognition and arbitration. The coal powers refused both, with the avowed purpose of breaking the strength of the unions. As to recognition, the unions, under present conditions of competition, are indispensable—as much so to general welfare as to the laboring classes—and since their efficiency depends on recognition, their recognition is right. As to arbitration, the legal right of both parties not to yield was perfect, there was no legal means for resolving the deadlock, the whole land was in dire distress—arbitration was the only possible way of relief. Under such conditions for any citizen to fail to support the demand for arbitration by every moral influence in his power indicates either a deeply perverted moral sense or the lack of any at all.

But if so, how about the scab as a hero? Since the unions are indispensable to general welfare, every workman ought to join his proper union as part of his civic duty. He should do all in his power to make its deliberations sober and wise; all in his power to raise unionism to that high plane that can be and must be the bulwark of mankind. To fail to do this is as shameful as to fail in any other great and momentous civic

duty. Should his union vote a wrong he should do what is right. Should it vote an unjust strike he should stand by his employer and job; and here he would rightly be a hero. Should it vote a just strike, he should stand by it to the last extremity; to do less would make him a traitor to his fellows, to his duty and to his manhood. For the non-union man there should be little sympathy. If the unions are bad he should join and make them good.

The unions must be recognised and elevated. The full force of public opinion must be brought to bear upon this and upon every subsequent issue according to its merits—according to what is right. Since arbitration is the sole solution of a legal deadlock, willingness to arbitrate must be made the first criterion in every case. Violence must be suppressed, if need be with the whole federal army. Yet as to violence it must be confessed that the unions stand on a higher plane than does average public opinion. It is now undeniable that the unions as unions inculcate restraint and obedience to law, in season and out of season, as the most vital principle of their success. They have learned this lesson well. And could public opinion but sympathetically appreciate how difficult it is to hold the sort of men which the labor leaders have to control up to this principle, when stung by gross injustice, they would make the air ring with approval at every effort to this end. Frank acknowledgment by public opinion that this *is* now the honest effort of the unions, and enthusiastic applause for it will do more than the entire American army ever can do. It will make these vast hordes feel that they are men, are men of honor and to be recognised and treated on this high plane.

So, also, regarding the union tyrannies, rules, and debasing evils of which I have spoken. The greatest crisis in history now approaches. Its two gravest dangers are: on the one hand, that the unions may now defeat their end by tyranny and folly, as formerly they did by violence; on the other hand, that the so-called upper classes remain blind to the vast changes of the times and to the need of encouraging the sense of honor and of manhood in all classes, themselves included. It is natural for those who feel first to think first. To an un-

prejudiced observer it is indubitably apparent that the working classes, as represented by their unions, are comprehending the problems of the day in advance of their more comfortably conditioned brothers. It is the highest possible evidence of the exalted stature of American civilisation that this should be so, and that the unions are found ringing strong and true against all violence. No one witnessing this can doubt for a moment that with the fight for recognition ended, the unions will rise to complete the claim that they most truly represent America's greatness, by now transcending the tyranny of their power as they have already transcended its violence. On the other hand, no one can as little doubt that the upper classes, whom the prick of circumstance has awakened more slowly, will not prove less men than their fellows.

In sinking all questions of natural rights to sober consideration of what is right; in generating a universal sentiment for honesty, poise, and sterling worth, a sentiment that shall crown these above all other distinctions, that shall put an end to all dishonesty, insincerity, avarice, gilded pretence or aught else that tarnishes, discourages, or obscures the highest human excellence—in accomplishing this lies America's supreme opportunity. Her past warrants that she will fulfill this destiny.

HORRTO ITO.